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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Verlag Barbara Budrich

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kaufmann, V., & Widmer, E. D. (2006). Motility and family dynamics: current issues and research agendas. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 18(1), 111-129. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-57871>

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Vincent Kaufmann and Eric D. Widmer

Motility and family dynamics: Current issues and research agendas

Mobilitätskapital und Familiendynamik: Gegenwärtige Forschungslage und
Desiderata

Abstract

Mobility capital or “motility” is an essential part of social integration in very modern societies, that, in turn, experience an increase in the number of ways in which people can move through time and space, and thereby ensure the simultaneous presence of human beings or actors. Today, strategic choices and mobility differentiations have taken the place of spatial constraint. We argue that motility is a good basis for the analysis of motivations, decision-making processes, and constraints that dominate the use of space. In doing so, we intend to show that, far from being a purely personal trait that essentially depends on innate skills or individual strategies, motility is construed within the family sphere. As such, it is a factor of the motivations that govern the functioning and the structures of the family sphere. After presenting the concept of motility and illustrating its implications for family life as well as for its spatial manifestations, we take a look at the effects of both family structures and family functioning on the acquisition of motility and on the point in time children leave home. We continue with an exploration of the links between residential location and the tensions that these links can produce between the residential context and the functioning of the family. As a conclusion, we take a renewed look on the spaces that are occupied by the family in light of our research findings.

Key words: mobility capital, motility, spatial constraints, family sphere, residential location

Zusammenfassung

Das Mobilitätskapital oder die „Motilität“ ist ein essentieller Bestandteil der sozialen Integration in sehr modernen Gesellschaften, in denen die Zahl der Möglichkeiten, sich durch Raum und Zeit zu bewegen, zunimmt. Dadurch wird die simultane Präsenz von Menschen bzw. sozialen Akteuren sichergestellt. Möglichkeiten der strategischen Auswahl und Differenzierungen in der Mobilität sind heute an die Stelle der räumlichen Beschränkungen getreten. Es ist unser Argument, dass die Motilität eine gute Ausgangsbasis ist für die Analyse der Motivationen, der Entscheidungsprozesse und der Beschränkungen, die die Nutzung des Raumes bestimmen. Wir beabsichtigen dadurch aufzuzeigen, dass Motilität sich innerhalb der Familiensphäre konstituiert und keinesfalls ein reines Persönlichkeitsmerkmal ist, das wiederum von angeborenen Fähigkeiten oder individuellen Strategien abhängt. Somit ist die Motilität ein Motivationsfaktor, der das Funktionieren und die Strukturen der familialen Sphäre bestimmt. Nach Vorstellung des Motilitätskonzeptes und Darstellung der Implikationen, die sich daraus ergeben, werfen wir einen Blick auf die Effekte, die die Familienstrukturen und die Funktionsweise der Familie auf dem Erwerb der Motilität sowie auf dem Zeitpunkt haben, zu dem die Kinder das Eltern-

haus verlassen. Danach untersuchen wir die Zusammenhänge zwischen dem Wohnort und dem Motilitätserwerb und den Spannungen, die diese Zusammenhänge zwischen Wohnkontext und dem Funktionieren der Familie hervorrufen können. In unserer Schlussfolgerung werfen wir im Lichte unserer Forschungsergebnisse nochmals einen

Blick auf die Räume, die von der Familie besetzt werden.

Schlagworte: Mobilitätskapital, Motilität, räumliche Beschränkungen, Familiensphäre, Wohnort

The capital asset of mobility – or “motility” – is an essential aspect of social integration in highly advanced societies, which are experiencing a multiplication of the ways in which people can travel through time and space (Urry 2000). Spatial restrictions of the recent past have been replaced by strategic choices and differentiation between types of mobility. In addition, technological and social innovations are continually widening the realm of possibilities for mobility, with the result that individuals and social groups are constantly expected to adapt to these changes. This requires various skills and resources which may be related with the way families function.

Several research endeavours have demonstrated that in the job market where flexibility is a prized asset, motility is a key resource for the career of anyone aspiring to upward mobility (Hofmeister 2005; Kaufmann et al. 2004; Lévy 2000; Schneider et al. 2002). Mobility is also shown to be an important aspect of everyday life. The combination of transportation modes (car, airplane, walking) and forms of mobility (physical, virtual, telephone, SMS...) has become key in a context in which the activity spheres within a single day have increased in number and spread farther apart. Such combination is used as a resource to ward off the spatial and temporal incompatibilities that actors must contend with (Flamm 2004).

Beyond the above observations, relatively little is known about the way in which people acquire motility. Using the hypothesis that motility is a good means of analysing people's motivations (Montulet 2000), their decision-making processes and the restrictions that prevail in the utilisation of space, we intend to show that far from being a purely individual trait that depends mainly on innate strategies or skills, motility is a by-product of family structures and family functioning. Although research on mobility capital and the family is still in its early stages, the aim of this contribution is to propose key hypotheses about the interactions between the two dimensions.

We first introduce the concept of motility and illustrate its implications on family life and its spatial forms. Then, we consider the effects that family structures and functioning have on the acquisition of motility. Third, we explore the links that exist between residential location and the acquisition of motility, and the tensions that these links generate between the residential context and the functioning of the family. We will conclude by examining the spaces occupied by families in light of the research presented.

What is motility?

Motility can be defined as the way in which an individual or group takes possession of the realm of possibilities for mobility and uses them. According to Lévy (2000) and Remy (2000), we can break down motility into factors having to do with accessibility (generally speaking the conditions under which the available supply can be used), skills (that are required to use the available supply), and appropriation (estimation of the options).

- *Accessibility* concerns service. It deals with all the financial and spatial-temporal conditions necessary for the available means of transportation and communication to be used.
- *Skills* are related to socialisation. There are two particularly important aspects of skills: the acquired know-how that allows someone to get around, and organisational skills, such as the way in which one sets out one's activities in time and in space, and how they are planned (ahead of time, by reaction, etc.).
- *Appropriation* refers to what actors make of the mobility options to which they have access. Appropriation, therefore, is about strategies, values, perceptions, and habits. Appropriation is notably formed by the assimilation of standards and values.

These three aspects form a system; they occur together and cannot be studied separately, as in the example of how a child acquires motility – a key element of family life which develops in stages rather than in a straight line (Bozon/Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994; Kegerreis 1993; Klöckner 1993). The process begins when the child is learning to walk, and continues when permission is given to play unaccompanied at a friend's house. It goes on with travelling alone in the daytime, and then in the evening. At each stage, there is the potential for negotiation (de Singly 2001; Depras 2001), but the terms often differ according to the sex of the child. The process of acquiring spatial autonomy, which leads to motility, illustrates the systemic nature linking its dimensions.

Travelling alone implies *access* to means of transport. However, although motorised means of transportation are very much in the forefront of children's minds as a symbol of freedom, children can only use such means of transport as passengers: their *appropriation* therefore takes place through play. We should nevertheless keep in mind that means of transport come with various social representations. While the automobile is highly prized (Pervanchon et al. 1991), as is the motorcycle, public transportation retains an undesirable social representation because of the restrictions imposed by its routes and schedules, and because it involves travelling with other people (Kaufmann 2000). These social representations can condition children's demands in the area of transportation, and will be the focus of negotiations between them and their parents over acquiring the *skills* that will allow them to master a motorised vehicle, and subsequently the purchase or availability of a vehicle. For that matter, in terms of *appropriation*, learning to drive is a unique time in the relationship between young adults and their parents: on the one hand, driving lessons restore parental authority and on the other, they foster a rela-

tionship of mutual trust (Pervanchon 2002). Using transportation unaccompanied as a teenager involves transgressions of societal rules with varying degrees of parental approval, tolerance, or tacit encouragement, depending on the mode of family functioning. These transgressions range from tampering with the engines of mopeds or scooters, to speeding in a car, reckless behaviour on a motorcycle, and riding on public transport without paying.

Another point is that the objective of motility does not necessarily lead to mobility; it can remain a potential. Moreover, when it does become mobility, it can do so in a variety of ways. These forms are interlinked and related to specific social temporal realities: the day and the week for daily mobility, the month and year for trips, the year and life cycle for residential mobility, and life history for migration. They also involve intermediate temporal realities, as is the case for the hybrid forms of mobility currently in formation, such as multiple residences (Kaufmann 2002); these different forms of mobility have reciprocal effects on one another.

Motility enables the relationship to time and space and its social construction to be described by focusing on the actors; it takes on different forms and may or may not be transformed into different types of mobility. To summarize, the concept of motility provides a fresh way of recombining the scattered pieces of puzzle of mobility research.

The effect of family structures and family functioning on motility

Contrary to the dominant tendency in research to consider motility as a purely individual asset, it is necessary to stress that motility may be acquired at home (Le Breton 2002; Limmer 2004), notably through negotiation and the transfer of resources between parents and children. We hypothesize that motility depends on both the day-to-day functioning of the family and the structures of the family. In this respect, three dimensions of family functioning are believed to have very direct implications for motility (Widmer/Kellerhals/Levy 2003).

- *Autonomy/fusion* refers to the amount of individual resources that are controlled by the family as a whole. It refers to the degree to which these resources are shared, but also the extent to which the members of the family unit allow their use to be put under the control of the family as a group. In its extremes, this area defines two very different methods of cohesion, the first based on the values of consensus and similarity, and strongly opposes differences and divergences among family members, while the second by contrast emphasises the values of maintaining individual specificities; in that case, a good family is one in which there are dialogue and exchange over these particularities rather than concern over resemblance (Kellerhals 1987; Kellerhals et al. 1984; Roussel 1980; Widmer et al. 2003; Widmer/Kellerhals/Levy 2004a).
- *Openness/closure* with respect to the outside world refers to how the family unit seeks or restricts contact with the outside (Reiss 1971). The end cases identified in this respect are on one side, extreme openness (i.e., the external world is perceived as a key component of the internal functioning without

which the family unit is seen as being threatened with suffocation), and on the other side, extreme withdrawal (i.e., restricting contact with the outside world is seen by the family as being absolutely necessary to maintain internal models) (Kantor/Lehr 1975; Widmer et al. 2004a). In the latter case, the outside world is perceived as a threat to the unit, either because it fosters a kind of ideological competition (different ways of thinking and doing things), or because it causes rash emotional or material expenditure.

- *Regulation* deals with how the family members coordinate. At one extreme, regulation is mainly prescriptive; general rules, sometimes followed ritualistically, mark out everyday life. Roles of spouses or partners are clearly split: Men are centred on work-related activities and women on the home and children. Open conflicts are avoided as much as possible, even at the expense of self-expression. At the other end of the continuum, family regulation is based essentially on open communication. The family members seek to agree on the significance of an event or situation by adapting their reactions – which are quite varied and strongly negotiated – to each case (Kellerhals et al. 1984). The negotiation process appears to be more important than the result; the main family goal is dialogue rather than consensus. The emphasis on the rights and duties corresponding to a status (wife, husband, child, oldest, youngest, boy, or girl, etc.) is cast aside. A great deal of flexibility is required for the arrangements of daily life.

We hypothesize that these three key dimensions of the functioning of the family have an impact on motility. Although research on the link between family dynamics and spatial mobility is still deficient, some partial results do suggest that these dynamics generate accessibilities, skills, and appropriations that are specific and unequal in terms of mobility.

In families that give priority to individuals over the group, developing the children's capacity for self-regulation is considered of primary importance (Kellerhals/Montandon 1991). Children must very quickly learn to make choices, and also to build individual strategies and take responsibility if they fail – and this in all areas of daily life. There is, in that case, a lot of latitude for negotiation, which is encouraged by the parents. This attitude is then reflected in how mobility is managed. Families oriented towards independence place greater value in the fact of a child being able to travel on his own without the need for family resources; they tend to allow their children more independence in their choice of destinations and trips, and control their schedules less. Some research on family socialisation, which includes spatial skills indicators, tends to suggest that these children learn to develop individual skills to manage the space outside the immediate family sphere faster. Therefore, families who adopt a contractual style of socialisation, in which independence is valued, promote higher scores among preteens for individual competence in managing space¹ (Kellerhals/Montandon/Ritschard 1992). By contrast,

¹ The space management indicators used in this study are as follows: „identify dangerous places in his environment” and “decide until what time to stay out in the evening” (Kellerhals/Montandon/Ritschard 1992).

those families who give priority to the group and to the collective dynamic seek to make their children dependent on the family means of mobility: their intention is to make travel time into collective time that the family will share, and they are more involved in the process of selecting the destinations and routes of their children. The mobility skills developed here, therefore have much more to do with the family than the individual – a mobility that some people, in referring to individuals in precarious situations, have called “dependent” (Le Breton 2002). From a different perspective, Olson and his colleagues have underlined that moderate levels of togetherness and separateness between family members are correlated with a higher level of autonomy of children while keeping their closeness with parents (Olson 1986; Peterson/Hann 1999).

The family’s relationship to the outside world is also closely related to motility. In families that are relatively isolated, the mobility of individual members is regarded with suspicion, as it is seen as a real threat for both the child and the family dynamics as a whole. External activities implying new friends, or classmates unknown to the parents, are all perceived with mistrust (Kellerhals et al. 1984). In such cases, outside trips are limited; visits to friends, classmates, and others are carefully controlled; and the child is allowed to visit only certain places with very specific instructions as to the routes to take. In this context, it can be hypothesized that the preferred residential location will be suburban, which will allow for such control since the child’s mobility independence is *de facto* not an issue. Similarly, according to the same hypothesis, certain means of transport, such as the automobile will be given preference – in fact those means that will precisely allow the family to maintain a fence even beyond the walls of their home. By contrast, families who value communication with their environment will push their children and teenagers to actively occupy space, to appropriate places, and to develop the skills that will allow them to make the most of their relationship with space. We hypothesize that these families will choose residential locations with a wealth of nearby amenities, allowing their children to integrate into their surroundings and to socially appropriate the city.

Finally, valuing a prescriptive type of regulation is associated with the strict control of a child’s daily activities that belongs to a style of socialisation referred to as “authoritarian”, according to Baumrind’s classical typology (1971). This case involves very tight control over all of the child’s activities, notably those that involve doing things outside the family: outings are limited and strict curfews are imposed; the territory of outings is monitored and restricted. Moreover, in this style, the degree of independence permitted depends heavily on the child’s status. The external activities of girls, for example, are monitored more closely than those of boys (de Singly 2001; Buffet 2002). It can therefore be assumed that the inequality of accessibilities, skills, and appropriations between the sexes and among different age groups will affect these aspects more than in other cases. Motility in such families, supposedly, then becomes a power game, in which a child or teenager must under no circumstances be allowed to escape from parental authority.

However, the terms “control” and “monitoring” must be distinguished from one another, the latter referring more to the “support” aspect of socialisation that is expressed through attention, interest, and regular communication between parents

and children – especially with respect to mobility. A great deal of the research – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world – has shown that monitoring is an important aspect of life course development (Bogenschneider/Small/Tsay 1997; Lamborn et al. 1991).²

In families based on contractual regulation, the independence of children and teenagers is seen more as an object that must be negotiated to account for the interests, desires, and sometimes contradictory activities of each person. The idea of openness to reflexive opportunities that is increasingly becoming a part of everyday life in progressively modern societies, surfaces here again (Flamm 2004). The influence of a child's sex or age is less strong, and the issue is rather to try to match projects that sometimes conflict with one another, for instance when parents want to go to the cinema and their child is invited to a birthday party some distance away. In order to resolve such complex situations, each person is encouraged to develop mobility skills that allow him or her to sit at the negotiating table with a card in hand. While negotiation is at the heart of the process of acquiring motility, as we emphasised above, motility may assume very distinct forms and unequal intensity depending on the importance attributed within the family environment to individual independence or collective integration (Widmer et al. 2003).

The examples that have just been given suggest that dimensions of family functioning are related to the acquisition of specific forms of motility. Former research shows that these dimensions ("autonomy/fusion", "openness/closure", and "negotiation/status") are relatively orthogonal with respect to one another (Widmer et al. 2004a). Their presence in specific styles of family interaction should therefore further increase the effect on motility described above. We can then assume that the children in a family that is simultaneously closed, fusional, and status oriented (a type known as a "Bastion") would have more restricted motility than those in an open family where independence is prized and the level of statutory regulation is relatively low. Unfortunately, there are no studies that analyse the combined effects of these aspects of family functioning on motility. Finally, an important point is that these aspects are quite closely linked to the family's financial and cultural resources: when these are plentiful, independence, openness to the outside world, and negotiated regulation are given priority; whereas few external resources result in family closure, priority of the group, and a more traditional regulation (Widmer et al. 2004a). The style of family interactions therefore undoubtedly explains in part the variations in the social distribution of motility, which is more concentrated at the top than at the bottom of the social scale, and especially when it comes to the differences in motility with respect to content (Kaufmann 2002).

Family structures, in addition to family functioning, affect motility, with certain structures producing higher mobility potential. In many cases, having divorced parents creates the necessity for a child to navigate between two households (Antony 1987; Kaufmann/Flamm 2003). A structural incentive to be mobile therefore

² Parental monitoring implies active communication between parents and children or teenagers. It is characterised by items such as: „When I go out at night, my parents know where I am" (Small/Kerns 1993) and „If my child will be coming home late, he lets me know" (Bogenschneider/Small/Tsay 1997).

exists in this type of family (Fagnani 2000), which expresses itself in different practices: the research carried out on this subject shows that children in shared custody situations have more freedom with respect to going out (Decup-Pannier 2000). Nevertheless, two substantially different family situations exist following a divorce (Le Gall 1996; Martin 1997). In the first, which is over-represented in the working class, divorce leads to a complete rupture, with the woman and children on one side, and the man on the other. In case of remarriage, the new husband meets the majority of needs previously met by the former spouse. In the second case, which is the most common occurrence in families with a high level of cultural and financial resources, divorce does not lead to a break-down of the relationship between the former spouses; instead, the relationship between the children and the parent without custody remains relatively active, and the spouse of the custodial parent plays much more of a complementary role rather than that of a substitute. In this second case, the former spouses often choose their residential locations to facilitate access to both "homes" to the children. The individuals then acquire mobility skills that allow them to manage this more complex family space, in a dynamic that combines more or less harmoniously individual incentives with collective motivations. Divorce and reconstituted families therefore affect the acquisition of motility differently, depending on the social and cultural resources at the disposal of the family. It can be assumed that they reinforce the trend among poorer families towards non-motility and the trend among wealthy families towards motility.

Motility and leaving home

Sociological research on children leaving home has been strongly influenced by Parsons' structural and functionalist perspective. According to this perspective, leaving home is often interpreted as an irreversible and fundamental break in the relational dynamics of the family. It marks the separation from the family of origin (or "family of orientation") and the constitution of a new family unit ("the family of procreation") that is functionally independent and thus capable of responding to market demands by greater residential mobility (Parsons 1949). The more capitalism expands, the more the independence of family units, which is both the cause and the result of geographical mobility, increases. In this context, fostering the motility of teenagers within their family of orientation is seen as prolegomenous to their departure from their parents' home. In other words, the family supposedly gives more and more freedom to teenagers in order to socialize them to the spatial independence that they will inevitably experience as young adults.

This thesis is undoubtedly valid to a certain extent, but it can be criticised for failing to distinguish motility from mobility. While it is true that the acquisition of motility within the family of origin allows individuals to adapt more functionally to the imperatives of spatial mobility that characterise modern societies (Giddens 1992), it does not necessarily lead to children leaving home earlier or more definitely. Since the 1960s the average age at which children leave home has remained stable, and has even increased (Galland 1991; Gokalp 1981; Villeneuve-Gokalp 2000); instead, this shows that modern societies do not lead to stronger breaks with

the family of origin from a spatial point of view. On the contrary, recent trends indicate that interdependence between parents and children is being reinforced in spite of the spatial distance – yet another sign that motility plays an essential role in family dynamics (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997).

Another fact contradicts the Parsonian approach to mobility and family dynamics: the lower the level of cultural and financial resources of the family of origin, the earlier and more definitive the departure of its children from home (White 1994). Following the functionalist perspective, one may hypothesize that wealthier families push their children out earlier onto the roads of independence, notably and especially in terms of space. However, this disregards the fact that the family remains a provider of resources throughout the entire life cycle; communication between all kinds of parents and children survives the children's departure from home (Widmer 2004). In this respect, motility can be considered not as a precondition to young adults asserting their independence vis-à-vis their parents, but instead as an element that makes it possible to preserve the link in an organisational framework that guarantees the autonomy of all concerned, but where moving out is neither imperative nor irreversible. From this perspective, it is easier to understand the link between the social resources of a family and the late departure of their children. We can surmise that especially via the styles of functioning that they implement, families with high resource levels ensure accessibility to transportation services, the building of mobility skills and know-how, and the appropriation of more expansive spaces, thereby removing the urgency from the residential mobility of their children. The terms under which children leave home, therefore vary quite significantly according to social status. In the working classes, moving out signifies quite a marked weakening of the support provided to the child, which is not the case in privileged circles where significant resources continue to be exchanged after the departure of the children (White 1994). In the former case, geographical distance is associated with functional distance, which is not true in the latter situation. Once again, this difference shows that motility differs according to the social resources available. Among the wealthy, distance is no obstacle because mobility capital – as with financial and cultural capital – is great, which is much less often the case among poorer people. The strategies of families concerning their children's motility and mobility therefore play a role in intergenerational social reproduction, as Blöss (1987) clearly points out.

In return, motility shapes interpersonal ties between adults. Couples or individuals with low residential motility belong to networks that are focused on family ties (Coenen-Huther et al. 1994; Pitrou 1978). There is a strong human density of relations in this type of network since the majority of its members are interconnected (Bott 1957). Ties tend to be strong rather than weak (Granovetter 2000), i.e. characterised by duration, emotional intensity, and multiplexity. By contrast, individuals with strong residential mobility have networks that are more open, more varied, and less dense (all members of one's networks do not necessarily know one another) and less centred on the family. In sum, residential mobility and immobility are related to belonging to different interpersonal relationship networks (Schneider 2003). A lack of spatial mobility therefore may create chain-like social capital characterised by homophily and strong ties, while motility can lead to

bridge-like social capital, characterised by heterophilia and weak ties (Granovetter 2000). These are two very different forms of social capital that are made available to individuals through their networks.

These forms of social capital in turn have varying effects on individual life courses. It has been shown that the absence of a network comprising relatives within close proximity increases the risk of marital problems and personal dissatisfaction, as well as difficulties with the children. However, a network of relatives that is too present also has negative effects on the couple and the individual (cf. Widmer/Kellerhals/Levy 2004). Motility therefore may backfire on family dynamics in a looping effect that shapes individual life courses while also affecting the urban environment, with extended families sometimes making their mark on the “neighbourhoods” (Blöss 1987). Each type of social capital has potentially positive and negative effects.

Localism, which is typified by a family belonging to a neighbourhood or district in which many relatives are present, facilitates childcare and other kinds of help (Dandurand/Ouellette 1995). Grandparents often play an important role in synchronising family temporalities and mobilities (Attias-Donfut/Segalen 1998), and are of invaluable assistance when it comes to accompanying and looking after children in countries where child care structures are insufficient or when the parents work different hours (Messant-Laurent et al. 1993). On the other hand, they also increase the probability of interference on the part of relatives in the couple’s or family’s life, which has an extremely negative effect on the family. This is when family quarrels affect the mobility space of individuals. The term “grieving area” has been used to describe a place which, in the mind of an individual, has become a dark area, off-limits, somewhere to be skirted and avoided, and which a family quarrel has removed from their realm of physical mobility (Le Breton 2002). Conversely, the network of relatives and friends – part of a family’s biography – plays a significant role in the future mobility strategies of individuals – for example, in their ability to react to a job loss by moving (Vignal 2002). In sum, while spatial mobility definitely has an impact on the social network to which an individual belongs, social networks are also a decisive factor in explaining individual mobility. It can therefore be said that the two realms are structurally interrelated during the biographical lifespan of a family.

Family and urban context

We have shown in the previous points that context has an impact on motility and mobility. So far, we have looked at the urban context through family structures and functioning, and considered how these factors are related to the choice of residential location. We now propose to adopt the opposite viewpoint and look at how context affects family life.

Scholars associated with the Chicago school considered the urban habitat detrimental to family structure. Robert Ezra Park (1952) expressed this theory about the city of Chicago in the 1920s well: in his view, at this time, the family unit was un-

dergoing “a process of change and of disintegration in all parts of the civilised world (...)” (Park 1952). However, these changes occurred more rapidly in the cities than elsewhere. The characteristics of city life – mobility, division of labour, rapidly increasing municipal institutions, and every kind of social advantage – contributed to bringing about these changes. Schools, hospitals, and various service institutions that had been established had, one by one, taken over the roles of the family, thereby indirectly contributing to the ruin of this ancient institution and the lessening of its social significance. Louis Wirth (1938) expresses a similar opinion in his article entitled “Urbanism as a way of life”, an inescapable reference in the study of urban sociology. In it, Wirth notably declares that “the distinctive traits of the urban way of life are often described sociologically as consisting of [...] the weakening of family ties, and the loss of social significance of the family” (21). Subsequent research has advanced the effects of human density as being responsible for this phenomenon (Chombart de Lauwe 1959; Smith 1980), stating in particular that high rates of human density generate physical effects (epidemics, famines, atmospheric pollution, unhealthy conditions), social effects (crime, deterioration of the education system), and psychological and interpersonal effects (mental illness, drug dependency).

Since then, density has been the object of many scientific debates that have widely invalidated the interpretation of the Chicago sociologists. These studies have shown the importance of going beyond the conception of human density as a simple technical value (Ittelson et al 1974; Giraud 1996; Amphoux et al. 2001) and seeing it as a concept that is subdivided into three “modalities of densification” (Amphoux et al. 2001): spatial, social, and sensitive. The question of how human density is perceived, and more generally, people’s experience of different building landscapes is specifically compared with the social and sensitive aspects of human density. As far as the social aspect is concerned, some studies have shown that the degree of social mixity of a place has a greater influence on the perception of human density than the mere concentration of its inhabitants (Amphoux 2001).

With respect to sensitivity, many factors are involved in the “architectural quality of densified spaces” or the “contextual suitability” (human density in relation to the perception of the place, country or city, etc.) The impression of human density in this case is conditioned as much by social considerations as by the more immediate influence of the existing buildings. More fundamentally, the links between family life and residential context and the fact that families are often not drawn to central residential locations can be attributed to two aspects: the difficulty of the self-appropriation of space and the numerous social interactions provided by the city.

Being able to appropriate one’s place of residence plays an important role in the extent to which it is perceived as somewhere that can be *inhabited* as one likes. *Inhabited* places provide the basis of that which Giddens describes as “ontological security” (Giddens 1992), and yet research has shown that a place of residence becomes a home when the relationship with this space extends into a relationship with the environment and the community (a person’s experience of the neighbourhood and the city) (Allen et al. 1998), and cities only rarely offer the ergonomics that allow families to truly appropriate their residences and public spaces.

The diversity that characterises cities multiplies the possibilities of coming into contact with difference, which can conflict with certain forms of family functioning that are based on intimacy or even closure, while allowing families that are open and appreciative of independence to flourish (Sennett 1980).

For these two reasons, many families are attracted to neighbourhoods on the outskirts rather than in the city centre. This is why ownership of a detached home is a strong desire among individuals – for reasons of space appropriation and forms of socialisation. Such a home symbolises a certain degree of success for the family and is often perceived as being necessary for a child's development (e.g., the garden allows a young child a degree of independence that would never be possible in a multiple-family residence). In many countries, including France, this desire is often materialised by a residence in the outer suburbs, and yet such locations are characterised by accessibility that is mainly based on the automobile and by few amenities in general.

The desire to live outside the city does indeed affect the daily mobility of families. Many pre-teens and teenagers in the suburbs depend heavily on their parents to get around (Ascher 1998; Kaufmann 2001), and this results in reducing the leisure time of women in particular (Klöckner 1998).³ Families living in the city also have their share of problems when it comes to daily mobility, but they are mostly related to the dangers of the street (Chombart de Lauwe 1977; Hillman 1993).⁴ This situation also leads to adults regularly accompanying their small and older children – to the park, to school, and to extra-curricular activities. Teens, on the other hand, have greater spatial independence in city centres (Kaufmann/Flamm 2003).

The two types of contexts – urban and suburban – have different implications for children's mobility. They result in the reshuffling of some of the stages punctuating the acquisition of motility. The right to go to school alone and to play in the street is replaced by having to be accompanied and by not being allowed to play outside without adult supervision. As a result, the process of the child's being given and assuming independence is transferred from childhood to adolescence, and is much less gradual (Hillman 1993). These situations indicate an interruption in the process of the acquisition of independence in growing children, which leads to a lack of socialisation in the urban milieu that may prove to be dangerous when 13-14 year-olds do finally and suddenly obtain greater independence: their perception of the dangers is inaccurate (Rosenbaum 1993). Context is therefore a key element in the acquisition of motility and the steps leading up to it.

The importance of context increases when the residential location does not entirely correspond to the family's aspirations, when it is the result of choices generally conditioned by the housing market, with the result that it is often not possible to live where one would ideally like. Two cases are fairly common in Europe:

³ For example, a recent SOFRES survey (2001) carried out on behalf of the GART shows that taking children to activities is the main reason that not having a car is a problem for families living in the suburbs or on the outskirts in France.

⁴ The book „Children, transport and the quality of life” (1993), edited by Mayer Hillman, is an important reference for any subject dealing with autonomy and independence in preteens.

- families who wish to live in large apartments in the densely inhabited city centre, but do live in the suburbs. In most large European cities, living in the city centre is becoming impossible for many families, whose space requirements and financial means are often incompatible with the “law of the market,” both for reasons of price and because large-sized housing is rarely available (Jaillet 2003). Given this situation, many families prefer to live in a detached home on the outskirts rather than living in the inner suburbs where schools do not always have good reputations (Kaufmann et al. 2001).
- families wishing to live in a detached home, but cannot afford to purchase one within the city. The desire to own an individual home is deeply ingrained in the culture of modernity, especially among families. The intimacy it provides with respect to neighbours, the fact that it allows outdoor spaces to be appropriated for all kinds of private activities (gardening, repair jobs, mechanics, etc.), and the fact that the garden provides a play area for the children – are all elements that make it attractive (Raymond et al. 1966; Avenel 2001). Since this type of housing is often unaffordable, or located in very remote outskirts, the decision is made to reside in the city in a multiple-family dwelling.

In both cases, the location does not correspond with individual aspirations, which are themselves doubtless ingrained in the functioning of the families. What happens, for example, in the case of a family who appreciates independence and openness, and who lives in an outer suburban area devoid of public spaces, nearby amenities, or access to public transport? The few pieces of research dealing with such cases suggest that such a situation results in tensions generated among the household members that are related to the constraints of space and time dependence (Kaufmann et al. 2001). Similarly, the work of Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (1977) on forms of sociability with neighbours in large multiple-family complexes shows that in certain neighbourhoods, there is a rule according to which it is mainly children who appropriate the public spaces – a rule which is gradually imposed on all the families present. This situation leads to conflicts among neighbours, particularly over at what time the children should go home; such conflicts sometimes even result in people moving out of the neighbourhood.

Going a step further, we may wonder to what extent the residential location of a family retroactively affects its functioning. Is the expansion of urban spread not being accompanied by the increasing number of families functioning according to the fusional and insular model? From a different angle, is the choice of residential location not a more or less direct expression of the type of family functioning? Is the need of families – albeit perhaps futile – who are increasingly governed by the standard of autonomy to affirm their fusional dimension not materialised through the acquisition of something that represents continuity *par excellence*? If this type of situation should prove to exist on a large scale, it would be rife with potential conflict and frustration for the families involved.

Conclusion

We have attempted to identify several promising areas of research and hypotheses that may contribute to a better understanding of the interplay between mobility and family dynamics and structures, using recent works on family and mobility sociology, and this research should be followed up by future field studies (Schneider et al. 2002). Motility, or mobility capital, is another form of capital like its financial, cultural, and social counterparts that shape people's life courses. Like the others, this form of capital is not acquired by isolated individuals, but rather through socialisation fashioned by family structures and family functioning. There are several indications suggesting that the main aspects on which researchers have based their analyses of family dynamics – the importance of the autonomy/fusion dimension, the relationship with the outside world, the mode of regulation, for example – are linked to specific ways in which the family manages space, which in turn generates unequal, or simply different, motilities. Several studies also indicate that strategies of upbringing, which vary greatly according to the available social resources and are also related to family structure and mode of functioning, also affect motility. The conditions and timing of the children's departure from home provide another opportunity to reflect on these issues and to show their utility for understanding one of life's important transitions. Finally, we highlighted that the context of a family's residence has its own impact on the acquisition of motility, while pointing out that it is also possible for families to choose their place of residence as a result of their mode of functioning – either to affirm and reinforce it, or to seek a challenge by making an incongruous choice.

Many questions concerning the dynamics of family mobility remain unanswered. To our knowledge, no empirical research has focused on the links that exist between family dynamics and motility so far. Indicators are most often very indirect, and convincing results are still all too rare (even if there are exceptions, like Schneider et al. 2002; or Blöss 1987). The trends isolated here nevertheless suggest that it would take much to shed full light on the effect that families have on this new factor of social inequality, motility. For example, is seeking contact with the unknown not linked to an appreciation of frequenting public places with the sociabilities this implies? And on the contrary, does the desire to keep the unknown at bay not result in the enjoyment of spaces where access is controlled, such as a private garden or a car? In other words, one may ask whether the way in which motility is implemented in family relationships may produce new kinds of social segregation involving spaces that are not purely residential. The lack of empirical research in this area is all the more regrettable since the interaction between family dynamics and motility creates the territoriality of family life.

A limit of this essay may be found in the emphasis on nuclear families, which is due to the available literature. The emergence of significant family contexts, which are not easily circumscribed with reference to a household or a limited set of family roles, has been underlined throughout the last decade by family and relationship scholars (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1994; Cherlin/Furstenberg 1994; Scanzoni/Marsiglio 1991; Scanzoni/Marsiglio 1993). In other publications (Widmer 1999; Wid-

mer 2006), we underlined the need to conceptualize contemporary families as large, ego-centered, and relatively unbounded networks, spread throughout geographical and social space. Approaching family contexts as networks rather than as small groups, such as the nuclear family, would certainly help us understand the interconnections existing between family dynamics and motility patterns currently emerging.

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Eingereicht am: 27.07.2005

Akzeptiert am: 10.04.2006

Anschrift der Autoren:

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